



NEWS CONFERENCE  
DECEMBER 4, 2015

MEDIA BRIEFING



## ACCOUNTABILITY FOR A QUALITY EDUCATION SYSTEM, TODAY AND TOMORROW

### What is AQuESTT?

AQuESTT stems from Legislative Bill 438, the Quality Education and Accountability Act, which was adopted by the Legislature in April 2014. The Nebraska Department of Education began the development phase in August 2014.

### ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Under AQuESTT, public schools and districts are classified and up to three priority schools designated as schools most in need of support to improve.

The results are for 245 school districts and 1,130 public schools. Of those 1,130 schools, 110 schools received an adjustment based on their responses to a state wide survey called the Evidence-Based Analysis or EBA.

Here's how it works:

- **CLASSIFICATIONS:** Under AQuESTT, school buildings and districts are classified into one of four classification levels. Here they are as well as the points earned for each classification level:
  - ✓ 4 Classification is considered Excellent
  - ✓ 3 Classification is Great
  - ✓ 2 Classification is Good
  - ✓ 1 Classification is needs support for improvement

### How were schools classified?

A classification is set by adjusting a school or districts initial Status points by certain factors and also considering limitations placed on how many points may be earned.

### Classifications points are based on:

- **Status** A school/district received 1, 2, 3 or 4 points based on its composite 2014-2015 NeSA assessment scores across all available grade levels and subjects.  
**NOTE:** School/district classifications can **only** improve by moving up a level or point **unless** the percentage of students' non-proficient on state tests increased year-to-year **OR** if the percentage of students tested was below 95 percent. Schools/districts lost 1 point or dropped one level if participation on state tests was 95- 90 percent and 2 points or levels if participation was 90-85 percent.  
**Important:** Classifications cannot exceed certain levels based on overall graduation rate. High schools/districts are Classified 1 or needs improvement if their grad rate is 70 percent or lower; 70 – 80 percent grad rate, classified a 2; 80-90 percent grad rate, classified a 3.

- ↑ Improvement A school or district earned an additional 1 point, in other words its classification improved by one level, if the school/district's average NeSA assessment scores over the past three years (2013, 2014, 2015) improved. The percentage of improvement required varied based on school size and grade level. See AQuESTT Classification Business Rules at: <http://aquestt.com/resources/>
- ↑ Growth Classification rating could improve by 1 point or one level if a certain percentage of the same students tested last year in reading and math improved their tests scores this year. The percentage of required improvement varied depending on school size and grade level.
- ↑ or ↓ Non-Proficiency Based on the percentage of Non-Proficient students over the last three years, if a school/district decreased that percentage, their classification could improve one level or 1 point but if more students scored Non-Proficient, the classification rating would drop one level or 1 point.
- ↓ Participation If the percentage of students taking state NeSA is low, the classification would drop, specifically, the classification would drop one level if participation is 95-90 percent; 90-85 percent the drop is two levels.
- **CLASSIFICATION LIMITS Graduation Rate** No high school/district could receive a classification a higher than:
  - o Classification 1 if 70 percent or fewer students graduated.
  - o Classification 2 if 70-80 percent graduated.
  - o Classification 3 if 80-90 percent graduated.
  - o If the graduation rate is 90 percent or higher, there is no effect on the high school or district classification. Graduation rates do not effect elementary or middle school classifications. The graduation rate is calculated using the corrected data used for AYP, and, as a result, the previous year's grad rate is used so this year the 2013-2014 rate was used.
- ↑ **Evidence-based Analysis or EBA:** Schools/districts could receive 1 point to move up a classification level based on their responses to a survey that collected data about how they support the six AQuESTT tenets, which are considered the core of the new system. The six tenets are: 1) positive partnerships, relationships, student success 2) Transitions 3) Educational Opportunities and Access 4) College and Career Readiness 5) Assessment 6) Educator Effectiveness. The responses to the EBA survey has provided information that will guide school improvement assistance and support for priority schools – schools considered most in need of support to improve – and also guide the Nebraska Department of Education in its continuous school improvement and support for other schools statewide. Common themes among schools in need of support have already been identified.

## PRIORITY SCHOOLS

**DESIGNATION PROCESS:** The Nebraska Department of Education conducted a comprehensive study of 110 schools designated in need of support by analyzing:

- Raw Classification Data
- Evidence-based Analysis Responses
- Demographic Characteristics
- School Improvement Plans
- Existing Systems of Support

That list of schools was narrowed to 52 for additional in-depth review that involved teams of Nebraska Department of Education staff who, in general, are most informed about the schools' challenges.

From those reviews, 10 schools were analyzed by looking at a more detailed report on their Evidence-Based Analysis responses and an expanded profile, identifying differences and similarities that created patterns of needs with the goal of selecting schools that reflect different Nebraska communities and different needs that could be supported by state and local communities, Department of Education staff, Education Service Units and other state education organizations, while informing NDE staff so they can expand state assistance to effectively help more schools.

### Support/Intervention Teams for Priority Schools:

For each Priority School a Support and Intervention Team will collaborate with school staff to identify and guide improvement efforts focused on the following key areas of school effectiveness:

- School Leadership
- Educator Effectiveness
- Improvement of Instruction
- School Culture
- Family and Community Engagement
- Use of Data for Continuous Improvement

The roles and responsibilities of the Support and Intervention Teams including the school staff will be to:

- Diagnose Key Areas of School Effectiveness
- Develop a Progress Plan for Improvement
- Monitor and Support the Progress Plan Implementation

The make-up of the Support and Intervention Teams will include the school principal as the team leader and school and district staff. Each team will consist of up to five members, and each team will receive support and guidance from the Nebraska Department of Education.

### Progress Plans for Priority Schools

Each Priority School will develop and annually submit a Progress Plan for Improvement to the State Board of Education for approval.

The content of the Progress Plan for Improvement will include:

- Required actions for improvement
- Measureable indicators of progress
- Strategies for improvement
- Timelines for improvement

The State Board of Education will review the Progress Plans and determine when a Priority School may exit priority status.